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SUBJECT: VISIT TO REFUGEE AREAS IN YEMEN INDICATES NEED FOR
CONTINUED FUNDING

REF: SANA 433

¶1. (SBU/NF) SUMMARY: A continued increase in the flow of migrants and draw down in international funding of NGOs threatens an already vulnerable and underserved community in the Basateen urban area and Kharaz refugee camp in the south of Yemen. A reduction in the funding of programs will have a detrimental effect on the refugees in these areas. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU/NF) On April 4 and 5, 2009 Refugee Officer visited the Kharaz refugee camp and the Basateen urban area in the south of Yemen. The Kharaz refugee camp is located approximately 67 miles west of Aden. The camp's population is constantly fluctuating due to the movement of refugees to other urban areas and new arrivals. The population is currently estimated at just over 12,000. The camp has no fence or set borders. It contains the most vulnerable refugees who have little access to outside resources and rely on the support services provided in the camp for food, water, shelter, and protection. While the conditions are generally quite difficult, residents have ample access to water, are given monthly food rations that provide basic nutrition from WFP, and have shelter provided by UNHCR, either tents or block housing. A local police force of 56 officers provides basic protection for the camp as long as relations with the surrounding villages remain cooperative.

¶3. (SBU/NF) The largest problem at the Kharaz camp is the relationship with the local villages and tribes. The local population regards the treatment of refugees as better than their own treatment. In response to this, they will often block roads to the camp or cut water pipes in an effort to force UNHCR, NGOs, and the ROYG to provide them with similar services. UNHCR and the NGOs have provided water, medical, and school services to these local populations to improve relations, including trucking water to a village 10 miles away in cooperation with the ROYG. While these attempts to improve the relationship between the camp and the local villages have been successful, the threat of road closure at any time remains a real concern.

¶4. (SBU/NF) Secondary problems at the Kharaz camp include overcrowding at the primary school and the residents lack of activities leading to disruptions. Refugee Officer observed classrooms of over 100 students in the primary school. The school lacks both the space and teachers to accommodate the population of school-age children. Most of the children were born in the camp after the arrival of their parents. UNHCR and NGOs have attempted to provide activities including sports, recreation, and cultural activities as well as vocational training and education for adults. These programs have been successful in reducing incidents of disruption at the camp by residents but there is a growing sense of hopelessness among residents as reported by the refugee leaders.

¶15. (SBU/NF) The Basateen urban area is located approximately nine miles west of Aden. Basateen was settled in the 1990s by both Yemeni returnees from Somalia and Somali refugees after the outbreak of civil unrest in Somalia. The area is completely unplanned and lacks basic urban infrastructure. The returnees and refugees built small dwellings using locally collected materials and corrugated metal. Housing and infrastructure are mainly created on an ad hoc basis as needs arise. Currently, the population is estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 by the government but UNHCR estimates it between 40,000 to 50,000. While there are some local residents, most of these numbers are Somali. UNHCR estimates 33% are registered as refugees. Residents tend to be marginally more self sufficient than those in the Kharaz camp as they have access to outside remittances or skills useful in the labor market. UNHCR and NGOs provide a variety of services to the residents of Basateen. While there are no food distributions, there are programs offering counseling services, vocational training, microfinance loans, a primary school, two medical clinics, and two wells for water. UNHCR and their implementing partners are also work on infrastructure improvements such as solid waste management and sewage.

¶16. (SBU/NF) Major problems reported by residents of the Basateen urban area include the lack of a consistent and clean source of water. Rumors in Basateen among the residents that the wells are contaminated have made residents wary of using the water. While UNHCR, NGOs, and the medical staff report that these rumors are false, the fear of the residents remains. Particularly, the primary school has seen an increased cost of trucking in water to meet the demands of the students because of a lack of consistent pumping of water from the well source. Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) has also been on the rise. In response UNHCR and an implementing partner, Intersos, have set up a community center where women have access to counseling services and legal remedies. UNHCR sub-office head, Leila Jane Nassif, also reported that, as the city of Aden

expands towards Basateen, there is concern that the residents will be evicted from the area as it develops.

¶17. (SBU/NF) In an April 4, 2009 meeting with UNHCR and local NGOs, participants reported two major concerns. One is the lack of a comprehensive national refugee law to provide initial protection for all migrants arriving in Yemen until UNHCR or the ROYG has an opportunity to make a refugee status determination. The second was the drawdown in funding sources for programs because of the global financial crisis. UNHCR also reports that, in September of 2008, the ROYG ordered local forces to arrest and deport all non-Somali new arrivals. This order has had limited enforcement. The Lahj and Taiz governorates have been enforcing the order to arrest but the other governorates have not. There have been no reports of migrants being deported. UNHCR has not had access to any of the arrestees, who are often moved to other detention facilities before UNHCR arrives.

¶18. (SBU/NF) According to UNHCR statistics, the flow of migrants into Yemen increased from 12,837 to 16,173 in the first three months of 2009 as compared to the same period in 2008. This represents a 26% percent increase in new arrivals over 2008. UNHCR and other NGOs expect this trend to continue through 2009. Each year the numbers of new arrivals is increasing as both civil strife and economic pressures in the Horn of Africa continue. Of the increase, almost all are non-Somali migrants, usually of Ethiopian nationality. Non-Somali migrants are particularly vulnerable in Yemen as they are often denied refugee status determination by the ROYG and are then subject to arrest and possible deportation.

¶19. COMMENT: (SBU/NF) As the number of migrants arriving on the shores of Yemen continues to increase, the stress put on UNHCR and NGOs that serve those communities is also increasing. This increased pressure comes at a time when funding for programs serving these migrants is decreasing. While post understands that PRM has not been able to monitor programs in Kharaz and Basateen since 2003 and that there has been a sharp decrease in the PRM budget, the programs there serve an increasingly vulnerable community whose need is growing daily. A reduction in funding will have a detrimental effect on these areas. END COMMENT.